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List of Abbreviations

BAMCEF	All India Backward (SC, ST and OBC) and Minority Communities Employees Federation
BC	Backward Caste
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
DS4	Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samity
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
OBC	Other Backward Caste
RPI	Republican Party of India
SC	Scheduled Caste
SP	Samajwadi Party
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UDF	Udadevi Force
UP	Uttar Pradesh

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Series Editors' Note

When this series, *Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*, to which this volume is a valuable new contribution, began in 1998, interest in its topic, both practical and academic, was already expanding. Dalit cultural assertion in the literary field had been active for decades, best known in Maharashtra and Karnataka. With the help of this, exploitation, discrimination and insult could be publicly challenged so that the deep sense of humiliation so widely occasioned by them could be, if only slightly, eased. The Dalit challenge, which took the form of printing and publishing, is significant because it highlights the modern Dalit achievement in the writer-and-readership of education. The Dalit assertion produced a literature of escape, escape from undeserved distress in a past which, as Ambedkar had expressed it, contained nothing of which Dalits could be proud. By the 1990s things began to change. A research project in Karnataka into local efforts to break out, through individual economic enterprise, from untouchability and its disabilities eventually became the first volume of this series in 1998. Experience here alerted us to more than we had been looking for. We became acutely conscious of the cultural contributions, always being made by Dalit castes to their society, first in the field of popular religion. More surprisingly, we found that they were often still making them. The inadequacies of any perspective that regarded the Dalits only as excluded and as victims of the caste order and the direct actions of the dominant within the caste hierarchy became clear. We felt, however that direct and radical challenges to cultural subordination still remained in the shadows. The series title that had been adopted at that point was geared towards further research in the field more than it echoed the achievements we had made so far.

Deeper and more direct challenges had come into clearer focus from elsewhere. Conspicuous in this was Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I am not a Hindu* of 1996 and the widespread and often agitated reactions it elicited. In those years, Ilaiah himself examined the philosophical and technological heritage of those he termed Dalit-Bahujans in Andhra Pradesh—Madigas, Adivasis, Washermen and others. He published newspaper articles and booklets, now in Telugu, for the attention of those most directly concerned. With expanding literacy and heightened inter-caste

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competition in the Mandal years, revisiting the past by exploring caste heritages became, at least in some conspicuous regions, both practicable and relevant to contemporary concerns. Identities, the negativity of which had been previously conspicuous, began to be proclaimed positively. Most striking, perhaps, was the adoption of 'Madiga', once amongst the most derogatory of untouchable caste names in Andhra Pradesh as a surname to be proclaimed by a new political leadership. A renewal of caste organization has been expanding through the lower reaches of the traditional order. Victimhood ceased to be sufficient. The range of Dalit cultural assertion, as we now see it so clearly presented in Badri Narayan's work, was deepening and diversifying.

The ever-expanding Dalit assertion brought with it a major new problem however. How would this awareness of positive cultural difference and resurgence of activity at the level of individual castes be compatible with a unified Dalit movement? The issue soon presented itself in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, after the spectacular emergence of the Madiga Dandora Movement in 1997 and the massive support it mobilized through its 1,000 km march from the village of the chief minister to the capital. The march proclaimed the Madiga name through the distinctive Madiga drum and its beat, and a tradition of song and dance, both of which had simultaneously been symbolically central to the caste and its identity, as well as challenging to others. The direct political goal of the march was, however, a division of the quota of Scheduled Caste reservation that had over the past two or even three generations benefited the other major Dalit caste of the state, the Malas, far more extensively than the Madigas. A four-fold division of the single quota in proportion to the population of groupings of similarly placed castes was the principle demand, which was at least briefly achieved. It was not a direct attack on the Malas but it inevitably affected their interests most directly. Old antagonisms were inflamed anew and Mala caste organization was brought into action to oppose the reform. An era of co-operation within a unified Dalit movement ended and the movement itself was stalled.

It is in this expanding field of culturally grounded caste assertion among the Dalit and other marginalized communities that Badri Narayan has been researching and from which he has been publishing his detailed studies over this same period. He focusses on North India and has a significantly different and perhaps more encouraging story to tell. His focal region is eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar and his book fits closely into our series also in the way it closely complements Sudha Pai's *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution*. They share a central

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concern with the Bahujan Samaj Party, its founder, Kanshi Ram and its former Chief Minister Mayawati, but they approach this interest very differently. For Badri Narayan, the departure point is with the people at the grass roots in villages and towns rather than the political elite themselves. According to Narayan, imagination and memory, which may be constructed out of myth and history, is 'the foundational requirement for the identity, self-respect and social existence of the marginalized communities in an age of power, conflict and competition.' He addresses the process by which positive claims of identity are established by these once marginalized castes. They are claims not to sympathy and support but to fame and power. In his region, Narayan finds two striking characteristics. One, the female heroes who have often been at the centre of these imaginings. They are heroes, not heroines, which commonly carries powerful but misleading gender stereotypes. Female heroes link meaningfully into a concern with local goddesses reaching back into the indefinite past. This volume specifically concerns itself with female heroes.

The other significant element of Dalit imaginings, explored in this book, is the great uprising of 1857, against the British—for the British, it was the Indian Mutiny, and for their challengers, the First War of Indian Independence. This book will show that the events of the 1857 Rebellion are a rich source to be tapped by caste associations for heroes, in order to acquire a positive identity. In all this Badri Narayan provides the English-language reader, with benefits not only of his first-hand researches over many years of grass-roots interaction, but also of his access to the by-now voluminous literature, in Hindi and other languages, of the people themselves, historians and activists. Narayan offers insight into a wholly different dimension of politics.

Only time and the further research that this work will certainly stimulate will indicate how generalizable Narayan's findings are across India. What is clear is that the rising assertiveness of Dalit castes is widespread. Both the political and the research agendas surrounding caste have shifted. Research in this area has witnessed a flurry of new sociological publications as the 20th century gave way to the new millennium. Dipankar Gupta's recent edited volume, *Caste in Question* (2004), to which Badri Narayan himself contributed, signalled the shifts in the subtitle of the book, *Hierarchy or Idenity?*, with remarkable clarity, giving importance to the Dalit castes in its chapters. Here, we see Kanshi Ram and the Bahujan Samaj Party adopting a strategy of caste mobilization through individual heroes for unifying not just the core Dalit castes but a wider section of the population that could deliver electoral majorities and

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therefore power in a democracy. Significant to this volume is the simultaneous construction of both individual caste identities and Dalit or even still more widely embracing identities that the analysis here identifies in UP.

What remains to be seen is whether this remarkable phenomenon can be evidenced in other regions.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Very often myths are more influential than reality, and very often myths give new meaning to reality. Memories too often help people triumph over an oppressive present and the past is often invented in new forms to overcome such a present. This can be seen in the case of many historically marginalized communities who give new interpretations to their past to suit the needs of their present, in order to move towards a better and brighter future. The Dalit castes of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in North India, who have always been ostracized and oppressed by the upper castes under the Brahminical cultural code of conduct still flourishing in this state, forms one such group. Though these castes together form the majority of the population, they have always been looked down upon by the upper castes, which in comparison to the Dalits form only a handful. Their cultural resources too have always been reviled by the hegemonic upper caste cultural code.

At present, however, a drastic change is noticeable in the socio-cultural scenario of this region, which has come out of the political and democratic processes of the country. In the last few decades, these erstwhile marginalized sections have been asserting their identities through myths, legends, heroes and histories of their own castes. Many heroes of these castes have begun to symbolize their caste identities, evoking feelings of pride and glory within their members. The political discourse of the Dalits today is based on their own culture, which is founded on caste heroes and the collective memories around them. These heroes and their myths help them to develop a new emancipatory cultural form that subverts the Brahminical code and resists the constant humiliation faced by them in their everyday lives that is sanctioned by the ancient texts of the upper castes.

Searching for heroes who could give voice to the assertion of their identity and who could be used for winning political power is undoubtedly a radical and emancipatory political transformation in culture. This process had been initiated by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the party which aimed at bringing all the scattered Dalit castes under one political umbrella. The BSP was the first to understand the significance of heroes

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as resources. Consequently, it developed a language of political mobilization filled with references to them so that this language could be easily understood by Dalits at the grass roots in whose oral traditions these heroes were still present. From the multitude of heroes of the various castes the BSP picked out a few women heroes of the 1857 rebellion who were projected as symbols of Dalit identity and who were then used to build up the image of Mayawati, the leader of the BSP. The success of the party's political strategy can be judged by the fact that Mayawati was the first Dalit woman to become the chief minister of the feudal, patriarchal and caste ridden state of UP.

How and why these heroes, and the myths and legends surrounding them, assume greater significance than the obvious economic issues facing the largely poor and underprivileged Dalits living in villages and small towns, is the underlying question of this study. For this purpose, my research teams have been travelling across the state of UP for the last seven or eight years. The immense popularity wielded by these heroes is evident in the stories narrated by the people at grass-roots level, their statues erected at various places, the plays narrating their bravery, the folk songs based on them and in the collective memories about them in the popular psyche of the people. This has inspired us to carry our study forward. This study would not have been possible without the support of people like Bhullar, Jhuria, Pyarelal, Babulal Bhanwra and other Dalit brothers and sisters of village Shahabpur, a village in UP, and the people of other regions of UP like the eastern region (Purvanchal), Bundelkhand and the central region (Awadh). We had developed very close ties with these people, and their narratives formed the data base of the study. Their warm hospitality and heartfelt enthusiasm gave me the confidence to move ahead.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor R.C. Tripathi, Director, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad, who provided me the infrastructure for conducting this study. Thanks are also due to my colleagues in the institute for their constant intellectual stimulation. This book is based on the project, 'Myth, Memory and Politics: A Study of the Language of Mobilisation of Grassroot Dalits.' I would like to place on record my gratitude to ICSSR for funding this project, and to Shailesh Upadhyaya, Surya Prakash Upadhyaya and Mousumi Majumder, who assisted me in conducting research for the project. I am grateful to Mousumi for translating all the Hindi pieces in this book into English. I am also grateful to the research team of the Dalit Resource Centre,

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G.B. Pant Institute, comprising Minu Jha, Vanita Somvanshi, Amardeep Singh and Nivedita Singh, who rendered their assistance whenever required. The office staff of the Manav Vikas Sangrahalaya, G.B. Pant Institute, in particular, Anwar Ali, S.S. Negi and Mathura Prasad also created the environment for carrying out the research smoothly. I am thankful to them for this.

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INTRODUCTION

Chhapak perh chhiwuliya patai ghan gahabar ho,
tahi tar khar hairniya ta man ati unman ho.
Charatai charat harinwa tau harini se puchhai ho,
harini ki tore charaha jhurane ki pani bin murjhai ho.
Nahi more charaha jhurane na pani binu murjhai ho,
ye ho aaj hawe raja ke barahiya tuhe mari daihai ho.
Machiya baithal Kaushilya rani ta harini araj karai ho,
rani masawa to sijhai rasoia khalari hame detiau ho.
Perawa pa tangwai khalaria mania samujhaiwai ho,
rani nit uthi darshan karabai manau harina jitai ho.
Jau Harini ghar aapan khalaria nahi debai ho,
harini khalari ke khanjhari marahaibaita ram more khelihai ho.
Jab jab bajai khanjharia sabad suni anakai ho,
yeho thari dhekulia ke nichawa ta harini bisurai ho.

(Translated)

(There was once a *chhiwuli* tree in Ayodhya near the palace of King Dasharath, under which a deer was weeping. When Rani Kaushalya heard the crying, she came out to find out why the deer was weeping. The deer replied that King Dasharath had taken away her cub and killed it. The deer wanted its skin back so that she could fill it with sawdust and pretend it was real so that her milk, which had dried up, could flow again. This way the gnawing pain inside her heart would be released. On this the queen said that she could not do so since the skin was needed to make a musical instrument (*khanjari*) for Lord Rama, who was then a baby, to play with. The Dalits of today are the descendants of this female deer and even today they are being oppressed by the uppercaste feudal landlords.)

This story was narrated by a folk singer of Jagriti Dasta of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) at a political rally in Karchhana tahsil, Allahabad district,

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on 4 March 2004. I would like to add that many such female deer have been born in Dalit communities who have now become sources of inspiration for the members of this community.

THE FUNDAMENTAL AND core feature of India's social structure is its caste system. Even after nearly sixty years of Indian independence, caste and the entrenched caste hierarchy still remain the symbol and essence of Indian society, differentiating it from other societies. This hierarchy, which accords some castes the privilege and the power to dominate over other castes, has been present in Indian history since time immemorial. The dominant Brahminical cultural code accords the so-called lower castes a highly inferior position in society and has drained them of dignity and self-respect in every domain of their lives. The lower castes, or Dalits as they prefer to be called, have always been marginalized by the upper castes, who have forced them to remain within the confines of their lowly birth-based menial occupations. The caste sytem has frozen mobility in social structure and socio-economic relations (Ilaiah 1994: 669). In the recent past, however, there is a visible upsurge in the assertion of Dalit identity, which challenges the humiliation that they have faced for centuries. There has emerged a strong urge among these marginalized groups throughout the country to assert their identity and self-respect through their own cultural resources and challenge the cultural hegemony of the upper castes. This is powerfully visible in North India, especially in Uttar Pradesh (UP), which lies in the Hindi heartland and has one of the largest population and land areas in the country.

The area of UP is 236,286 sq. km. Its population is 166,052,859 (2001 Census). The state is spread across a vast expance in the heartland of India starting from the north-western to the south-eastern ends of the country. Physically, it can be divided into two parts—the Gangetic Plain and the Vindhyan Hills. The Gangetic Plain is divided into two major portions in UP. These are the Upper Ganges and the Middle Ganges Plains. The Upper Ganges Plains lie mainly in UP, while a part of the Middle Ganges Plains also lie in Bihar. The Upper Ganges Plains can be roughly divided into two parts at the confluence of the Yamuna and the Ganga in Allahabad, the point which divides the entire state into eastern UP and western UP.

It is a noteworthy fact that economically, and concomitantly, socially and culturally, eastern and western UP greatly differ from each other. Western UP, which borders the rich state of Punjab, is far more prosperous than eastern UP, which borders the poor state of Bihar. Districts like

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Bulandshahr, Meerut and Saharanpur, which lie in western UP, have been engaged in a broad process of agricultural development, because of which there is no overwhelming poverty in these districts, although UP, overall, is one of the poorest states of the country. Irrigation is well advanced and the farmers are very close in spirit to the hard working Punjabis. The eastern part of UP is the polar opposite of western UP, since the farmers here are not as enterprising as those in western UP even though the land resources are very high. This region has remained neglected and backward, which has encouraged people to believe that the people here are lethargic, caste ridden, tradition-bound and unresponsive to change. There is a high rate of migration from this region, a large proportion of its population moving to cities in western UP, Punjab and other relatively more prosperous parts of India in search of work. In the middle of eastern and western UP lie the Central Plains, which occupy an intermediary position between the two extremes of the west and the east. The economic growth in the region is sluggish and the standard of living is just above average though better than in the east. The farmers are not as hard working as in western UP though they work relatively harder than those of eastern UP (Pai 1986: 4–5).

In total there are 70 districts in this state, which differ widely from each other in terms of socio-economic development. What is, however, common in all the districts is the dominant Brahminical cultural code, which is still active and flourishing despite the fact that the Dalits and other oppressed castes constitute a majority in the population and that the system of protective discrimination is more than half a century old. The ill effects of the heirarchical caste system, which this dominant Brahminical cultural code has spawned, have prevented the fruits of development from reaching the large majority of Dalits. But the recent periods have seen a new generation of post-independence educated, upwardly mobile, socially aware and political conscious Dalits, who, through the BSP, aim at ensuring social justice within the society and polity for the *Dalit-Bahujan* (lower caste majority section). Contrary to popular conception, the party came into existence as a reaction to the social, political and economic exclusion faced by the Dalits from the benefits of development, and not with an agenda of breaking down the caste system (Charsley and Karanth 2002: xii). Realising that caste is much more an emotional issue than a religious one (Ilaiah 1994: 669), the BSP, which had been launched by Kanshi Ram in UP in 1984, converted caste into an ideology and tried to capture power by the re-creation of a culture of dissent among the Dalits of this state.

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This strategy has helped in strengthening their socio-cultural and political mobilization and has provided a popular base for their participation in the democratic and political processes of the state and of the country. It was in 1995 that a Dalit political party came into power, for the first time, in UP, with a Dalit woman, Mayawati, who was the leader of the BSP, as chief minister. Although the ideology of the BSP was based on the unfulfilled mission of Jyotiba Phule and Dr Ambedkar, which was to provide identity and social respect to the Dalits, it laid strong emphasis on the construction of a Dalit identity through the creation of icons and symbols. These icons and symbols were culled out of the culture of Dalits as markers of pride and glory. As observed by Ashis Nandy, the fixed political language touches only the less important self of the society, but when it mixes with culture it goes much deeper. This is because Indian society is organized more around culture than around its politics (Nandy 1990: 49). The BSP was the only party that realized this in the context of Dalit politics in North India and tried to concretize the identity of a 'majority society' (*bahujan samaj*) through the alliance of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) by rallying around their culture and identity. Like Ilaiah, Kanshi Ram believed that unless the culture and consciousness of the oppressed is put forward visibly in public debate and is prepared to clash with the culture and consciousness of the enemy in public, a society of equals will remain an illusion (Ilaiah 1996: 168). In other North Indian states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and so on, which are also caste divided but where the BSP is not active, Dalits have not been able to come together as a single group in a big way so as to assert their power and identity. In these states, caste has not emerged as an ideology and although the Dalits there have acquired, to some extent, a consciousness about their marginalized socio-cultural status, this has not been converted into a political consciousness. In Bihar, for example, many left parties and radical groups are fighting for the rights of the oppressed and exploited, but in fragmented forms, without any effort to consolidate them into a homogeneous category. In this state too one can find a dissenting culture among the oppressed and exploited Dalit castes but it has not been transformed into a political consciousness like it has with the BSP in UP; although even in this case culture is being used, to some extent, as an instrument to mobilize peasant labourers by the parties influential there. In UP, the BSP has helped to develop Dalitness as an important idealogical constituent in the construction of their identity. Converting caste into an ideology and capturing political power through parliamentary means is

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an important development in the Indian political system, which was achieved successfully by the BSP under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati (Ilaiah 1994: 669).

There appear to be five elements behind this strategy for Dalit empowerment. First, the struggle for participation in the power structure of the country, especially in the bureaucracy and political leadership (*satta aur shasan*), through the use of cultural symbols and identity markers. Second, the deepening of the process of democracy so that all the marginalized Dalit communities may be free to invoke their own cultural symbols without the fear of being suppressed by the dominant Brahminical culture. Third, the belief of the BSP leadership that these cultural symbols of Dalits will help the community to develop the confidence to fight against socio-economic inequality. Fourth, providing respect to these personalities who have done pioneering work for the uplift of the Dalits and giving them their rightful space in history and fifth, the belief that in their struggle to provide respect to these personalities, the Dalit communities will also attain respect, which will consequently facilitate in elevating their position in society.

But is this identity-based politics merely the politics of tokenism or is it a long-term investment for Dalits to subvert the humiliation that they have faced for centuries, and to regain their pride by placing their struggle for empowerment in the democratic domain of society? Many critiques of Mayawati and the BSP claim that during her tenure she spent huge amounts of money on installing statues, memorials and parks rather than on development activities. Mayawati, however, argued that one of the most notable achievements of her government was the glorification of the personalities who had struggled to bring about social change. Every official publication brought out during Mayawati's tenure as chief minister, highlighting her achievements, mentioned that she had waged a battle to bestow due respect on Dalit saints, gurus, heroes and other great Dalit personalities.[1] The naming of districts and universities after Dalit icons greatly enhanced the feelings of self-respect and self-worth in the Dalits who visited them. That the BSP understood this can be evidenced from the fact that in a public meeting addressed by Mayawati, the people were promised that if the sisters and daughters of the BSP were given power, then she would change the names of all the districts which had been named by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after upper-caste personalities.[2]

In the introduction to the book *Samajik Parivartan ke Liye Sangharsh Karnewale Mahapurushon ka Samman*, published by the Department of Information and Broadcasting, Government of UP, when the BSP was

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in power, Mayawati says that since the last 2,500 years, great persons, such as Mahatma Buddha, Maharshi Valmiki, Eklavya, Kabirdas, Ahilyabai Holkar, Chhatrapati Sahuji Maharaj, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, have waged wars to bring in social change. As a result of their efforts, people belonging to the downtrodden, backward and deprived communities are now staking their claim in the democratic processes of the country. They are also actively participating in the fight against social inequality and injustice and striving hard to lead a life of dignity and self-respect.[3] The strategy of installing statues of and glorifying the leaders of the Dalit struggle was carried forward in all the three terms of the BSP rule in UP so as to inspire in the Dalits a need for social change. From this it is obvious that the political strategy of celebrating the memory of these great personalities was a deliberate one in order to build up confidence among the Dalit communities.

Various studies show how marginalized castes are becoming conscious about their caste and are entering into the competitive domain of democratic politics, for example, Anuja Agrawal's (2004) study of the Bedia caste, Lucia Michelutti's (2004) study of the Yadavs and so on. Castes are now proud of their identity regardless of where textual traditions place tham on the 'purity-pollution' hierarchy. Ahirs, Gujars, Jats, Patidars, Adi-Dharmis and so on have a strong sense of pride in their caste identity (Gupta 2004: xiii). Interestingly, there is even an apparent replication of the dominant social order within the lower-caste community, which may be one way of articulating an independent cultural identity, besides demonstrating dissent against the hegemonic social order (Karanth 2004).

Why are heroes and histories so important in the political and social struggle of the Dalits and for the assertion of their identity? At which point does imagination start creating reality? Why are myths sometimes more real than reality? When do questions like 'who are we?' become central issues in the political mobilization and emancipatory politics of marginalized communities? How are stories, statues, craft and politics developed around these questions? In this book we will search for answers to these questions not from the elite perspective but rather try to analyse the inner logic that lies around these issues within Dalit politics in UP.

This book studies the burgeoning Dalit politics in North India especially in UP, a politics that is based on Dalit dissenting culture, women heroes (*viranganas*) and icons and on how these are used as symbols of Dalit assertion even as the BSP build up the image of Mayawati, the present leader of the BSP. The invention, reconstruction and representation of

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the myths and memories of the role of Dalits in the 1857 Rebellion, and their use in electoral mobilization by the BSP in gaining the support of Dalit communities, is also a focus of study in this book. In this manner, the book tries to understand the relationship between cultural politics and the democratic participation of marginalized communities of UP. The book will bring out the hidden issues related to identity construction, which underlie the obvious issues related to the fulfilment of basic needs and socio-economic development, and will examine how they are being used to politically mobilize the Dalits at the grass-roots level. The book will also try to explore the sources from where these icons of cultural identity construction and politics originated, how they are being used as identity markers in their political mobilization, their influence on the collective memory of Dalit communities and why the influence that they wield is so powerful. Also examined is the evolution of the dissenting culture of Dalit communities emerging through these cultural symbols, which is becoming increasingly assertive at present.

In this respect, the book is a continuation of the discussions made by Sudha Pai (2002) in her book *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Agenda*. In her book, she has critically, yet sympathetically, tried to analyse whether the BSP has helped in empowering the vast majority of subaltern Dalits or whether it has merely helped in the upward mobility of the elite sections of the Dalits. She has also investigated the larger phenomenon of Dalit assertion and its relationship with the BSP. The study examines the emergence, ideology, programmes, mobilizational strategies and electoral progress of the BSP, against the backdrop of two important changes in UP since the early 1980s: the strong wave of Dalit assertion and the shift from a broad aggregated single-party system to a cleavage-based multi-party system in the post-Congress phase. She believes that the uniqueness of the BSP is a product of both the democratization process and the affirmative action policies of the state in post-independence India. But in the recent past, as an outcome of its political compulsions, the BSP is being forced to make alliances with parties with whom it has had strong disagreements on principles. At the end of her book, Pai has also tried to discuss new forms of Dalit assertion through cultural symbols such as the symbol of Ambedkar as used in the political mobilization at the grass-roots level. Here she provides space for discussing culture as politics, culture and politics, and the culture of politics, as present in contemporary Dalit mobilization in UP.

This is the other side of the politics of Dalit assertion and mobilization that I will attempt to explore in my book. In brief, this book is an attempt

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to capture the process of Dalit mobilization as it takes place in the state of UP through the use of dissenting cultural resources like myths, legends, local heroes and histories. It is an attempt to understand the constituents of and the processes that make the language of Dalit political mobilization in this region. In essence, the book is an extension of my earlier studies on how myths and legends of different regions of North India. For example, the myth of Chuharmal and Reshma, popular in the Mokama district of Bihar (Narayan 2001b), the myth of Suhaldev, popular in the Bahraich region of UP (Narayan 2005), and the myths popular among castes like the Nishads (ibid.) are being used for the electoral mobilization of particular caste groups by various political parties. This book attempts to carry forward the same train of ideas and studies how the Dalits of UP create an alternative history as a form of dissent, from which the BSP culls out women heroes and the myths surrounding them to build up the image of its leader Mayawati. It will focus primarily on three women heroes of the 1857 Rebellion, namely Jhalkaribai, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi, who are being used by the BSP, among other heroes of the rebellion like Avantibai Lodhi and Pannadhai, to build the image of Mayawati. The field work for the study was carried out in the Bundelkhand region, the Awadh region and some villages of eastern UP where these three heroes on whom the study is based are popular.

Another dimension that the book will explore is how Dalit imagination of their past in the nation-making process, especially their role in the 1857 Rebellion, is used as a mobilizational resource by the upcoming Dalit communities themselves to reassert their contemporary desires for more benefits, discriminatory protective policies and an appropriate share in ongoing development projects launched by the Indian State. The point of departure is the apparent role of imagination as the foundational requirement for the identity, self-respect and social existence of marginalized communities in an age of power, conflict and competition.

Women Heroes and the Cultural Dynamics of Dalit Politics

A few studies on the caste system of India have tried to show that the lower and untouchable castes have no culture of their own and, instead, replicate the dominant social order within their communities (Dumont 1980; Moffat 1979). According to Gupta, these studies deny the very

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existence of cultural autonomy among lower castes, and, instead, group them all together as if there is a solidarity among them sufficient to replicate that from which they have been excluded (Gupta 2000: 54–85). Deliege (1992) refutes Moffat's hypothesis because of lack of evidence for such solidarity. Empirical studies, on the other hand, like that by Karanth (2004), show that replication may also be seen as a way of establishing an independent cultural identity as well as expressing dissent against the hegemony of the dominant social order. Such dissent, however, does not go unchallenged, and in his study, he points both to the hegemonic dominance of the upper castes and to the means which are at the disposal of untouchable castes to achieve cultural autonomy (ibid.: 138). My own study of the Mokama district in Bihar shows that there are multiple cultures existing there of which the culture of the lower-caste Dusadhs is an important one. The study tries to bring out the manner in which the Dusadhs create an alternative space by subverting the mainstream culture through their own cultural resources like their myths, legends, folk tales and folk heroes, and how various political parties use them to mobilize this community under their electoral fold (Narayan 2001b). In UP, the strategy of the BSP was to explore these alternative spaces, created through the cultural resources of the different Dalit castes of the state, which are able to arouse within them self confidence and a consciousness about their identity, as also develop social solidarity among the newly created alliances of these castes that have undergone centuries of humiliation by the upper castes. With this objective, the BSP evolved a pantheon of local heroes and symbols from backward and Dalit communities who could be revered by this section as their caste symbols (Kumar and Sinha 2001: 89). These characters, who were picked up from the stories and legends popular among Dalits at the grass-roots level, were given a new interpretation by party intellectuals and politicians in their political speeches. These were then circulated back to the population at the grass roots so as to create a new memory and imagination. The Dalit icons of Maharashtra and South India like Dr Ambedkar and Periyar were also given due importance but the primary focus was on the heroes who were rooted to the soil of this region. In this manner, the BSP developed an icon-based politics, which suited the collective memory of the people of this region. These folk stories and folk songs with dissenting narratives, which were transformed into liberative, emancipatory messages, were disseminated to the people through Cultural Squads (*Jagriti Dasta*). The squads presented these transformed messages to the people living in

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villages through songs, poems and dramas at political rallies just before elections were scheduled. One such propaganda song goes like this:

Beeyespee ki neeti nirali jo sunle sukh paye
Yug yug se is desh ka bahujan jaldi hi sukh paye
Jyoti Rao, Ravidas, Subba ne jiske liye kurbani di
Babasahab Jhalkari ne apni amit nishani di
Tumhe chhorke bahujan ka itihas likha na jae

(Translated)

(BSP's strategy is unique, whoever hears will be happy
The oppressed Bahujan over the years will soon find joy
For whom Jyoti Rao, Ravidas, Subba sacrificed their lives
Babasahab and Jhalkari left their indelible marks
Without you the history of the Bahujans cannot be written)[4]

This song shows how the memories of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Ravidas have been blended with the memory of local heroines like Jhalkaribai of the 1857 Rebellion to create the memory of Dalit heroes over the years. Evidently, the BSP strategy of creating a language of political mobilization involves delving into the collective culture of the Dalits, which is a repository of myths, heroes and legends.

When Mayawati, a Dalit woman, succeeded Kanshi Ram as its leader, the BSP modified its strategy in order to build up her image as a woman who had all the qualities to lead the party. It developed an aggressive marketing strategy to sell Mayawati and the ideology of the BSP at the popular level. To do this, it picked out a few local women heroes like Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Mahaviridevi, Avantibai Lodhi and Pannadhai, from among the many other Dalit heroes of the 1857 Rebellion in order to help people identity them with Mayawati. There may be two reasons for selecting women for building up the image of Mayawati. First, goddesses feature more than gods in *Dalit-Bahujan* narratives (Ilaiah 1996: 188). Ilaiah mentions that Pochamma is the most popular goddess in Andhra Pradesh. So also, in UP too goddesses are very influential in the collective psyche of the people at the grass roots. They believe that whenever good or bad happens, it happens because of the anger or happiness of the goddesses.[5] These goddesses protect the people from all kinds of natural calamities, especially diseases, and thus their devotees hold them in very high esteem. Second, these heroes were portrayed as having played significant roles in the 1857 Rebellion along with mainstream nationalist heroes like Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and Begum Hazrat

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Mahal, but who were not given proper recognition due to the contrivances of the upper castes. A collective memory was recreated around these heroes in those parts of UP where their stories were popular and integral to their oral history, through the construction of statues and memorials and the organization of fairs and celebrations in memory of these heroes. The 1857 Rebellion was selected as the backdrop for narrating their heroism because this rebellion, which came to be known as the 'First War of Independence,' was an event that made deep inroads into the psyche of the people of North India and is present more in popular oral traditions rather than in the written form.

The 1857 Rebellion was concentrated in the North Indian Gangetic belt beginning from Delhi to Bengal. It began in Meerut on 10 May after news spread that the garrisons in Delhi had revolted and expelled the British. This acted as a catalyst that saw a great deal of activity on the part of the civil population, leading to its spread to other parts of UP. There were uprisings on 20 May in Aligarh, on 23 May in Etawah and Mainpuri and on 27 May in Etah (Mukherjee 2001: 65). In this way, the rebellion moved to other parts of UP and Bihar like Kanpur, Awadh, Banaras, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Gonda, Bahraich, Sitapur, Ghazipur, Sultanpur, western Bihar and finally to Bengal. In upper India, it was more in the form of a turbulent agrarian upheaval gathering together a wide variety of discontents. The rebellion had not yet taken the form of an organized movement against the British but it commanded extensive popular support, especially in Oudh, throughout the North Western Provinces and in western Bihar. Sepoy discontent was an essential ingredient of the rebellion but the mutiny derived its strength from the civil population (Metcalf 1990: 60). Peasants, political *sadhu*s (Pinch 1996: 9), local kings and most importantly the conservative sections of society, who had suffered greatly under the British rule, became united against fighting colonialism. The British Government put up a stiff resistance to the rebellion. Their retribution was harsh and deadly. Village after village were burnt or felled with cannon balls to quash the rebellion. Thousands of rebels were hung from gallows and an equally large number were hung from trees as instant punishment. Although the rebellion ultimately failed, it developed a consciousness about colonialism within the people, especially of the Awadh region of UP where the rebellion was most intense. It could also be described as the beginning of a rennaissance in the Hindi speaking region of India. The scanty recorded history of that period did not, however, document the large number of battles fought by the common people as part of the rebellion and which had left a lasting impression on

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their minds. Recorded history only told the stories of rich feudal landlords, and kings and queens like Rani Laxmibai and Tantya Tope. The stories of unsung heroes who played their role behind the curtain of written history were circulated only in oral history in rural North India. This fact gave the Dalit intellectuals a lot of space to pick out their own heroes of the 1857 movement and use some of them for building up the image of Mayawati. It is interesting to note that the role of the Dalits in the 1857 Rebellion has been negated by a few extreme Ambedkarite and leftist journalists and scholars who have tried to link it with dissatisfied feudal lords, kings, soldiers and peasants (Mishra and Kumar 2002: 12). The BSP has, however, found a wealth of resources in the oral history of the regions of UP where the rebellion took place and has tried to mobilize Dalits at the grass-roots level using local heroes, histories, myths and legends.

Mayawati first came to power for a brief period of four months in June 1995 and then for six months in March 1997. It was for the first time in the history of independent India that a Dalit woman had become a ruler and that too of the most populous and, caste-wise, most fragmented state of the country. This was no mean achievement for her since UP society is also the most feudal and patriarchal. But she defied all the existing norms and mustered enough courage to challenge openly the powerful institutions that oppress the poor Dalits. Not only this, she proved to be an able administrator, turning on its head the age-old allegation that Dalits cannot rule. Her powerful personality won her the title 'Iron Lady', after Jamil Akhter, a reputed journalist authored a book in Hindi, called *Iron Lady: Kumary Mayawati* (Akhtar 1999). Kanshi Ram, her mentor, also reiterated the title for her, which appeared to be based on the toughness exhibited during her rule. The lawlessness of UP was so widespread that Mayawati had to put behind bars about 145 thousands rowdies, criminals and *goonda*s (Kumar and Sinha 2001: 86). This and other such attempts to discipline the state evoked a sense of satisfaction among the Dalits who had been routinely subjected to humiliation and callousness at all fronts. She proved to be a highly popular leader of the Dalits and Bahujans, whose sense of dignity and self-esteem were significantly elevated under her chief ministership. The Dalit women attending the general meetings and rallies of the BSP, who easily outnumber the women attending meetings of other parties exclusively for women (Bharti 1996: 23) mainly because they are freer than upper-caste women to leave their houses, also identified strongly with her. This has been used as a leverage by the Bahujan Mahila Morcha, the women's

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wing of the BSP, who, in their district conferences, exhort the women not to emulate Brahminical norms of womanhood, which is to be meek and submissive; but to be brave and assertive like the women heroes of their castes (Bharti 1996: 35).

Mayawati's Image Building and the Print Medium

Mayawati's acceptance as a leader of the masses was made possible, to a large extent, by the BSP's projection of brave women heroes as symbols of Dalit identity and by building up her image as an incarnation of these heroes. This was greatly catalysed by the print medium. Print media in the form of popular booklets, posters, handbills, pamphlets and so on played a very effective role in this process by disseminating stories about these heroines and their role in the 1857 Rebellion among the common people. Even since the emergence of print as a medium of mass communication, it has always been used as a potent tool for sensitizing the Dalit population as it helped to transmit information to the literate section of the common Dalit population. This medium has also been used by the Dalits and other marginalized communities of India to deconstruct the dominant narratives of Indian nationalism and create and disseminate their own history of struggle in nation-making. It was used to subvert the dominant narratives of Indian society that had always kept them marginalized. In addition to building their self-identity it also helped in their political mobilization, which was then translated into votes.

In the colonial period various lower castes had started writing their caste histories, from where the caste heroes and myths were culled out by different political parties for electoral mobilization of Dalit communities. The reaction of the Dalits to the oppression and suppression of the members of their community and the lack of awareness about their tradition and culture may be cited as the reasons that prompted them to write their own caste histories. The process gathered momentum after independence when a small section of the lower-caste communities expressed an urge to write their own caste histories so as to project them as alternative history. Projecting an alternative history was basic to their assertion for a respectable identity in the caste hierarchy prevalent in society. Identity was far more of a 'project' than a 'real' connection with a well-established past (Sarkar 2002: 45). This alternative history was disseminated among the common people through popular booklets and newspapers published from small towns of UP. They were written and composed by the Dalits themselves, containing legends and stories about

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local heroes and their role in nation making. These were circulated within the literate section through various libraries such as Aadi Hindu Library, Ashok Pushtakalaya, Kanpur and Ambedkar Libraries that were set up in many regions of UP.[6] Many newspapers like *Achhut*, *Usha*, *Adi Manav* and *Samata* were also launched, most of which were based on Dr Ambedkar's philosophy. Through these papers, the editors and writers not only conveyed the philosophy of liberation from social castigation, but also established the significance of the print media in Dalit mobilization and identity formation. Henceforth, the print media has been a great driving force in bringing to the fore the pain and anguish of the Dalit sections of society, and also in finding the ways and means to emancipate them. It became a potent mode by which the arithmetic of power and politics could be represented, a mode which was later used extensively. Dalit social reformers like Swami Achhutananda, Badri Balmikanand and Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu made full use of it to challenge the Brahminical hegemonic order. Around the same period, Ambedkar raised the slogan to 'educate, organise and agitate' among Dalits. He also gave a concrete form to his ideas of education when he established the People's Education Society in Bombay in 1945 (Kumar and Sinha 2001a: 9). His message spread to UP through the educated Dalit sections and helped to develop a culture of reading, writing and publishing in this state as part of their struggle for social respect.

After independence there was a fall in the production of Dalit literature but in the last few decades since the emergence of the BSP in UP in 1984 there has been a sudden spurt in the publication of popular booklets (Narayan 2001a: 3924). These booklets were written by Dalit writers living in the small towns of UP, to express the aspirations and identities of their communities. The Dalits were disillusioned with the state because of the unkept promises made at the time of independence. They began to demand protective discrimination and a share in the development projects and welfare schemes launched by the government. At the time of the implementation of the Mandal Commission in 1990, many booklets were published, most of them centred on their past. Through these booklets the Dalits wanted to establish that the basis of their demand for reservation, as recommended by the Mandal Commission, was to correct the long history of oppression and suppression suffered by them. The logic posited by them was that earlier they had been the ruling community but the conspiracies of the upper castes had deprived them of their historic glorious status (Kushwaha 1993: 23). Through these booklets, the Dalits also assert their role in the making of the nation by re-narrating the story

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of the nation. This story highlights the sacrifices made by various heroes of their castes by saying that despite the sacrifices made, their desires, dreams and promises are yet to be fulfilled. These narratives help them to demand a respectable place in the contemporary process of nation building and a substantial share in State-sponsored development projects and various other kinds of democratic benefits. By repeatedly narrating their role in the nation-making process, they put forward a moral logic in favour of reservations and social justice for themselves. They assert that despite their historical role in the building and development of this nation, the state has not helped them to recover from their past social, cultural and economic losses. They believe that their role has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the recorded history of nation making and their contribution in the freedom struggle has been completely ignored (Kushwaha 1993: 26). These booklets help to spread the feeling of nationalism among Dalits at the grass-roots level by putting forward their actual contribution to the freedom struggle and claiming compensation in the present. This nationalism is in effect 'a state of mind, an act of consciousness' (Kohn 1944: 10), made possible, as demonstrated by Benedict Anderson, through the development of newspapers, books and administrative bureaucracies that allowed millions of people to 'imagine' themselves as part of the same community (Anderson 1983). According to Anderson, this remarkable redefinition of identities results from cultural transformations that evolve along with new technologies for distributing information in the early modern era. New technologies disseminate new cultural narratives in newspapers and novels, all of which creating 'the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.' The Dalit intellectuals in the BSP used the print medium to their advantage both for claiming their share in the nation and for building the image of Mayawati.

From Dalit to Bahujan

In the context of contemporary Dalit politics, the term 'dalit' is a generic term including not only the untouchable (*achhut*) castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy, but also the socially undeveloped, oppressed, exploited lower castes that are not all untouchable. Thus Dalits include SCs, STs, the so-called criminal tribes, nomadic tribes, OBCs and other backward social groups. These are the communities that are socially, educationally, economically and culturally backward and have been so for many

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centuries. The word 'dalit' is a recent one but the concept of Dalitness is old. The term 'dalit' in Sanskrit is derived from the root *dal*, which means to split, break, crack and so on. When used as an adjective it means amputated, stepped on, split, broken, burst, destroyed or crushed. Dalit implies those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in the social hierarchy in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of karma, pollution and legitimized caste hierarchy. 'Dalit' has come to symbolize change and revolution (Zelliot 2001). According to Nandu Ram, though the term 'Dalit' represents a particular social category of people, and it is now being used by all the untouchables irrespective of traditional and parochial caste distinctions as representative of their social identity.

The term Dalit was first used by Dr Ambedkar but some sources claim that Swami Shraddhanand, a follower of Arya Samaj, first coined it (Bechain 1997: 27). However, the etymology of the term goes back to the ancient times when they were known in the ancient Hindu religious texts as *shudra*s, *atishudra*s, *chandal*s, *antyuj* and so on. In the 19th century, a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, used the term 'Dalit' to describe the 'outcastes' and 'untouchables' as the 'oppressed and crushed victims of the Indian caste system.' Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes,' a term used by the British for what are now called the SCs. In 1930, a newspaper was published for the depressed classes in Pune called 'Dalit Bandhu' (Friends of Dalits) (ibid.: 98). Dr Ambedkar also used the word in his Marathi speeches. With increased sensitivity, the leaders of the Indian freedom struggle replaced it with a new term, 'Harijan,' coined by Mahatma Gandhi. In cultural parlance, they were all commonly known as *achhut* while in legal terminology they were called 'Scheduled Castes' or SCs. SCs were the castes listed in the schedule by the Government of India Act 1935. They were defined as 'such castes, races or tribes or parts or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, tribes, parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the depressed classes, as His Majesty in Council may specify' (Government of India Act 1935, First Schedule, 26i). The purpose of lists in the schedules was electoral, since seats in legislative assemblies at the national and provincial levels were to be reserved for members of listed castes, and they were to form a primary electorate to choose candidates. An Indian Franchise Committee, assisted by, amongst others, the anthropologically learned Commissioner for the 1931 Census J.H. Hutton, deliberated at length over the criteria for

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inclusion and over untouchability in particular (Charsley and Karanth 1998: 22–23).

Since the early years of listing was mainly for electoral purpose and was based on the stigma borne by the castes, many castes petitioned for exclusion after judging the other members that were included within this category. Soon, however, when the benefits became apparent, the very same castes tried to retain membership and the castes that had originally being excluded, tried to seek inclusion. Religion was another bone of contention, since the 1935 legislation, as 'untouchability' was a Hindu problem whereas the SCs were equated with 'Depressed Classes.' Lower castes that had converted to the Muslim and Christian faiths were sought to be excluded from either protection or benefit under this legislation (see Pinto 1992).

In UP, Chamar, Pasi, Dhobi, Khatik, Dusadh, Basor, Dhanuk, Balmiki, Kori, Dom, Gond, Kol, Dharikar, Kharwar, Musahar, Beldar, Kanjar, Nat, Bhuaiar, Ghasi, Habuda, Hari, Kalabaz, Kapadia, Karbal, Khairaha, Agariya, Badhik, Vadi, Baiswar, Bajaria, Bajagi, Balahar, Bangali (seller of snakeskin and herbs), Bansphor, Barwar, Bedia, Bhandu, Bauriya, Korwa, Lalbegi, Mazhabi (Kahada), Parika, Paradiya, Patri, Saharia, Sansiya, Bahelia, Balai, Bawaria and others are the untouchable castes included in the Dalit community by the Dalit political forces. Together they comprise 21 per cent of the total population or 29,300,000 people, of which the Chamar make up the largest percentage—55 per cent. Pasi is the next largest community, which has a population of nearly 3,425,929. Dhobi, Kori, Balmiki, Shilpkar, Khatik and Dhanuk are the other numerically important Dalit castes in the state (Prasad 1995: 20).

Dalits also include the Scheduled Tribes (STs) who are referred to as *adivasi* or original settlers in the Constitution of India. In 1931, they were given the name Scheduled Tribes after they were included in the list of communities that needed special attention. In UP the total population of STs is 22 per cent and they are mainly concentrated in Mirzapur and Sonebhadra. The so-called criminal castes are those that were listed as criminal tribes by the British. They were denotified in 1952 through a parliamentary act, and some of these castes were included among the SCs. Many of them are nomads who wander from place to place across the country (ibid.: 22).

The OBCs who are also included within the category of Dalit by Dalit political forces are those castes which occupy an intermediary position in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Economically and socially as backward as the untouchables, their touch was not considered polluting by the

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upper castes. They could thus work as servants in their households. This led these castes to identify themselves more with the upper castes than with the untouchables and to keep away from them. Historically, this feeling of superiority has been the reason for the schism between OBCs and the untouchables. But after the implementation of the Mandal Commission report granting protective discrimination to SCs, STs the OBCs and the Backward Castes (BC), a unity was forged between the dalits and the OBCs against the upper castes during the anti-Mandal movement. At that time, a large chunk of the OBCs joined hands with the BSP and started identifying themselves with the Dalits. Simultaneously, the BSP also wooed many of the OBC castes using their myths and legends to link them with the Dalits. Earlier the majority of OBCs had been under the influence of the BJP which has been identified more with the upper castes. This helped to widen BSP's horizon but many OBCs castes like the Nishads are still with the BJP. The Samajwadi Party (SP) is also trying hard to win the sympathy of these castes. Some important OBC castes of UP are Kewat, Tewar, Gararіya, Kahar, Nai, Mali, Bhar, Rajbhar, Bind and Kanera (Prasad 1995: 72). The BCs are the castes that lie above the OBCs but are lower than the upper castes in the caste hierarchy. They believe that the people of these castes were originally Brahmins and Kshatriyas who were declared social outcasts under the strict social and cultural code of conduct. As a result, many of them add the middle name 'Singh' to signify their affinity with the upper castes. Although the BSP in UP is trying hard to bring the BCs under their fold, these BCs prefer to link themselves with the SP. The Ahirs (Yadavs), Gujars, Kurmi, Lodhi, Kumhar, Darji, Lohar and Sonar are some of the major BCs of this region (ibid.: 74).

Today, after so many centuries of being relegated to the margins, the Dalits have come to occupy centre stage in the political arena of the country. The movement for their assertion, which was earlier concentrated in Maharashtra under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar, has now shifted to North India (UP, MP, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Bihar), with UP in the lead. This has been possible because of the emergence of the BSP which has its base in UP. Though Dalit leaders have been present in different political parties in the state, the BSP has overshadowed them through its methods of horizontal and differential mobilization (Kumar and Sinha 2001: 14). Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP has succeeded in changing the language of discourse in understanding caste, which locates caste in the analytical category of sociological position and not of economic position (Ilaiah 1994: 669). With the aim of avoiding the stigma

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attached to the concept of 'dalit,' he floated the new concept of 'bahujan' (majority society), which while constituting 85 per cent of the country's population, have been suppressed, oppressed and exploited by the remaining 15 per cent of the upper castes (Kumar and Sinha 2001: 70). The Bahujans comprise the Dalits, OBCs and Minorities who together form the electoral base of the BSP. In Kanshi Ram's scheme 'bahujan' symbolizes not a majority as perceived by Budhha and Mahatma Phule but an ideological category that can create a base for political empowerment. Kanshi Ram was convinced that only with a significant share of the political power of the country would the Dalits be able to change the existing power structure and subvert the dominance of the upper castes, which constitute 15 per cent of the country's population. He further argued that minority rule over majority (Bahujans) is not just. Therefore, for the establishment of an order based on equality, liberty and fraternity each section of the society should be given representation according to their strength (population). Thus, the BSP was launched on 14 April 1984, the 83rd birth anniversary of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Omvedt has described its formation as deliberate and not reactive. She says:

> First in contrast to almost all other Dalit and Dalit-based organizations of the time, its formation and structure appears as deliberative and not reactive, emerging fourteen years after Kanshi Ram's resignation from government service. It has consistently refused a 'reactive' agitational stance, which has meant, in practice, staying out of many major Dalit struggles. (Omvedt 1994: 162)

Kanshi Ram as a leader showed strict adherence to the constitution and parliamentary democracy throughout his struggle. This trait brought him close to Ambedkar in the realm of political thought. Ambedkar also had full faith in parliamentary democracy. As Kuber (1991: 300) noted:

> He had full faith in parliamentary democracy and urged the cultivation of constitutional morality. He advocated the transformation of political democracy into social and economic democracy. To cultivate democratic trends, he urged the creation of public conscience. He explained public conscience as conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who was the sufferer and remarked that non-scheduled castes in villages did not fight for the scheduled castes.

To make the political power of the Dalits effective, Kanshi Ram criticized the political reservation (Articles 330 and 332) of the Dalits.

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He believed that the Dalits who got political reservation after the 'Poona Pact' became the stooges of the upper castes and spoke the political language of the political parties that gave them reservation. For real representation, the Dalits did not need such reservations (Ram 1998: 79–123).

Today the BSP has attained the stature of a national party. It stands third in the country, in terms of the percentage of votes it has won, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress (I) ahead of it (Kumar and Sinha 2001: 73). For the first few times that it fought parliamentary elections it entered into alliances with the Samajwadi Party (SP), the BJP and Congress (I); but later on, the BSP leadership dropped the formula of pre-poll alliance with other political parties. Instead it tried to develop its organization independently by social political mobilization horizontally and differentially, differentially because the BSP is the only party with an ideology of the economic and social emancipation of the 'Bahujans,' but it has also organized the Dalit castes horizontally and intends to distribute power according to the percentage of each and every caste in the population, especially the Dalits and the most backward castes in the state as well as in the country. Thus, the mobilization can be called horizontal mobilization (ibid.: 81–84). In the next chapter, we will study the new narratives of Dalit politics which are filled with memories of dissent against dominance and oppression, that are being used by the BSP to acquire political power through capture of state power. A political consciousness is being created among the Dalits, which is significantly helping in their mobilization. In this process, their consciousness is becoming not only cultural but also political.

Notes

1. *Samajik Parivartan Ke Liye Sangharsh Karne Wale Mahapurushon Ka Samman*. Suchna Evam Jansampark Vibhag, Uttar Pradesh, year not available; *Dalit, Pichhre Evam Alpasankhyakon Ke Liye Liye Gaye Kalyan Karya*. Suchna Evam Jansampark Vibhag, Uttar Pradesh; *The Journey of Social Change*, a photobook of the installaton of statues by BSP. Suchna Evam Jansampark Vibhag, Uttar Pradesh, April, 2003.
2. *Hindustan*, 21 September 1998.
3. *Samajik Parivartan Ke Liye Sangharsh Karne Wale Mahapurushon Ka Samman*. Suchna Evam Jansampark Vibhag, Uttar Pradesh, year not available.
4. Interview with Babulal Bhanwra, village Shahabpur, Dt. Allahabad, 26 January 2004.
5. Interview with K. Nath, Dalit writer, Allahabad, 12 May 2005.
6. Ibid.

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Chapter 1

New Narratives of Dalit Politics

There was once a king who had four wives. None of them had any children. In time, the youngest queen became pregnant. This made the other queens very jealous. When it was time for the queen to deliver, the king had to be away from the palace. He hung up a bell near the queen's bed and told the other queens to ring the bell as soon as she had given birth.

The other queens, out of jealousy, did not heed his instructions. When the new mother fell asleep, after giving birth to twins, the other queens killed the two newborns putting some bricks and stones in their place. They then rang the bell to inform the king that the queen had given birth. The king was livid when he heard that the queen had produced stones and bricks. In a fit of rage he threw her out of the palace. The queen took shelter in the forest and took up the job of scaring away crows that destroyed crops in the fields of rich people (*kauwa hankni*).

The wicked queens had told the killers to kill the two children. The killers took pity and buried them in the forest where they grew into two beautiful trees covered with flowers. Whenever any person came near them to pick flowers, the trees grew a little higher just out of reach of the person. One day their mother, the *kauwa hankni*, came near them. As soon as they saw her they both bent down and embraced her lovingly. This broke the spell cast on them and they once again became princes. Together with their mother they went to the palace and claimed their rights to the kingdom.

(This story was presented in the form of a play by the students of Ambedkar Vidyalaya, a school for Dalit children, located in the village, Shahabpur, 15 km from Allahabad. The school is run by a Dalit activist named Babulal Premi. The play was put up on 26 January 2003, in a function that had been organized in the school premises. Kamalakant Gautam, State Secretary, and Member of the Legislative Council of the BSP, was the chief guest. After the play, Mr Kamalakant Gautam commented that the children of the *kauwa hankni* were the new heroes of the Dalit movement who had been deprived of their birthright by the conspiracies of the upper castes and who were now fighting to get it back.)

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THE NEW NARRATIVES of Dalit politics, which appear as cultural narratives of identity and self-respect are filled with memories of dissent against dominance and oppression. The language too is filled more with cultural and social symbols and metaphors than with economic ones. It borrows heavily from folk culture and is a mixture of power, authority, dissenting folk culture and the popular memory of Dalits. When it is expressed through their own cultural symbols, it evokes their collective memory and constructs their identity in a new way. The use of the cultural idiom through these narratives is seen to facilitate the acquisition of political power through capture of state power. A political consciousness is being created among the target group, which has significantly helped in their mobilization. In this process, their consciousness becomes not only cultural but also political. The BSP has been successfully using these new narratives as influential tools for mobilizing the communities that form its electoral base. It would be interesting to investigate the sources of these narratives, the resources from which they are drawn, the main constituents of these narratives and the language in which they are written. Why and how they have become so effective is another interesting area of study. This chapter will delve into some of these issues.

Since the early years of Indian society, the Brahminical mode of composing, defining and interpreting history, culture and stories became the basis of the formation of narratives in the form of puranic stories, *vrat kathas*, folklores loaded with Brahminical values, ritual stories and songs. Through this the Brahmins created a Brahminical mindset and a normative frame of reference by which the Dalits were accorded an inferior position. To counter such oppressive historical constructions, the subaltern groups have continuously engaged in communicating their own stories, which they had composed in various forms. They have also constructed a plethora of symbols which are used as tools for empowerment in response to the urge to acquire self-respect. This is not merely to deliver oral accounts or to construct a genealogy of lands and events but to restore order in the world as perceived by them. The creation and compilation of contesting histories and narratives are ongoing processes that are transmitted to the Dalits at the grass-roots level in the form of stories, riddles and genealogies. These are the major features of Dalit orality that are found in various folk languages in North India like Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Braj, Bundeli and so on. The sources from which the legends and heroes are drawn are origin stories, *jati kathas*, folklore, the nationalist movement and socio-political movements.

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Constituents of Narratives

The stories that describe the origins of various lower castes emerged as a popular form of 'protesting narratives.' This form of narrative, on the one hand, integrates caste narratives with the Brahminical narrative, but in this process also creates its own space and uses this space to express dissent. Different from academic 'history,' these stories liberate marginalized groups of Indian society and enable them to enter into the meaningful domain of knowing, inventing, creating and telling a past that is able to dialogue with the present (Narayan and Misra 2004: 26)

Most upper and middle castes in Indian society also have their own caste stories. Called *caste purana*s, these stories are a part of the oral tradition, but have also surfaced in written form at various times. As many sociological studies in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have shown, the narratives of the higher castes are based on upper-caste religious texts called the *purana*s.[1] The *caste purana*s create a privileged social space for the higher castes, which allows them to legitimize their philosophy. The stories are replicas of puranic stories and rhymes in which each caste links itself with great mythological *rishi*s and *muni*s. These *caste purana*s do not follow the pattern of the pure puranic narrative system, but attempt to snatch space within the Brahminical metanarratives by assuming a parodic form (Narayan 2002: 161).

The stories of the lower castes are commonly referred to as *Jati biradari ki katha* or *jati katha*. They are parallel to the *caste purana* of the upper castes (Das 1977: 10) and are the creations of the castes themselves, usually based on their folklores, which express a social order that runs against the order described in the metanarratives. One finds in them definite protests against Brahminical forms. An attempt to go for an alternative content is visible in the parallel histories of the lower castes, although at many places the tendency to accept those forms is also visible. This appears to be mainly because of their ambiguous attitudes towards the Brahminical and puranic narratives. The extent of ambiguity varies with different deprived castes on account of their changing social, economic, political and cultural conditions. Thus, the history created and recorded by those castes that have been pushed outside the history narrated by the dominant sections has evolved differently in terms of content and arrangement of text.

Rather than having mere entertainment value as is sometimes supposed, these *jati katha*s function as vehicles for dissenting values, cultures and memories and also as instruments of social control. They prepare the

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mental ground for depressed communities to take the path towards identity construction. The symbols, heroes and histories of these stories articulate the aspirations, dreams, ambitions and the urge for the reconstruction of the identities of these groups and communities. The words, metaphors and the entire imaginative structure of the stories may reveal to the discerning eye, the subjectivity of the narrator, which reflects elements of identity consciousness. These stories, as narrated by the concerned communities, are not mere fiction but existential articulations that reflect cultural contexts in which their identity can be located. However, they are not always coherent but are usually fragmented and episodic. A story may be found to be a product of many stories and folklores like folk tales and ballads depicting both the origin and evolution of that community and its social needs and struggles.

MULTIPLE HEROES

The caste stories of Dalits may either be related with the origin of the caste or centred around heroes of that caste. Origin stories are descriptions of the circumstances in which various castes originated. The purpose of these stories is to identify the social space of that caste in the Hindu social set up. Almost all the stories try to link themselves with the Great Tradition, but they also create and analyse the situational matrix within which that caste had been pushed to the outermost orbit of the social structure by the upper castes. For example, the Chamars narrate the story of the origin of their caste in the following manner.

> There was once a Raja who had two daughters, Chamu and Bamu. Each of them had a son of great physical power. One day an elephant died in the palace grounds. As the Raja did not wish to cut its body to pieces, he inquired if there was anyone strong enough to carry the carcass away and bury it. Chamu's son performed the task, whereupon Bamu's son declared him an outcaste. The desendants of Chamu came to be known as Chamars. (Briggs 1920: 16)

The Chamars try to glorify their caste by linking important historical persons to it. Bhullar, a fifty year old semiliterate Chamar living in Shahabpur, a village on the outskirts of Allahabad, UP; and a follower of the Ravidasi sect, a sect very popular among the Chamars of eastern UP and Bihar, said, "Charmavansh (Dynasty of Chamars) have ruled over the entire subcontinent for the last 178,000 years. According to the genealogical tree, Shambook, Supak Das, Ravi Das, Harish Das, Mordhwaj,

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Eklavya and so on belonged to the Shudra *gotra*. Even though Eklavya has often been considered to be a Nishad, he was also a Shudra. That is why all the *rishi muni*s were born in the Shudra caste. There were only one or two *rishi*s from the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes but the rest were Shudras. Valmiki and Parashar were Shudras too as was King Ashoka. His pillar is still alive *(ajar amar*)[2]

In eastern UP, the Pasi community traces its origin to *Rishi* Parashuram, a mythical Brahmin saint who was reputed for his militancy. The community members claim that they were born from the sweat of Parashuram but he did not give them his name or accept that they were born from him. The manner in which this story is narrated brings out, on the one hand, the Pasis' desire to link themselves with the Great Tradition and, on the other, their critique of Brahminical norms both for not giving them their rightful position in the social domain and for causing their downfall by conspiring against them. Fifty-five-year-old Khichrilal Pasi, living in Pasiyapur, also in Shahabpur, Allahabad, narrates the myth in the following manner,

> One day, when Parashuram's mother was in the process of delivering Parashuram in the *sauri* (maternity room), a butcher called Kamrukamachha started leading away 1,600 cows from the village. The villagers complained to Parashuram's mother, who expressed helplessness since she was in the act of delivering a baby. By then Parashuram Maharaj emerged from his mother's womb with the umbilical cord tied around his waist. He ran after the *kasai* (butcher) and started fighting with him. He fought bravely, sometimes throwing him away and sometimes turning cartwheels himself. By this time he was sweating profusely. He shook his head to remove the sweat and when the beads fell on the ground, five Pasis emerged from them. These Pasis also joined in the fight and killed Kamrukamachha. Parashuram then released the cows and brought them home. The five Pasis requested Parashuram to take them home with him since they had had nothing to eat. Parashuram replied that his umbilical cord had still not been cut so he was incapable of looking after them. The Pasis then asked him what they should eat. Parashuram replied that they should eat the rear end of the pigs that were passing by after dipping it in sandalwood paste (chandan) to purify it. The Pasis acquired great strength by following the advice of Parashuram. There was no match for them in the entire country. One day Lord Vishnu was passing by on an elephant along with Narad Muni. On seeing the Pasis playing nearby, Narad angrily asked them what they were doing. The Pasis, in return, pulled the tail of the elephant, which came loose in their hands. Narad then remarked to the Lord that these people were very strong and would soon control the earth if not stopped.

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A few days later Narad Muni, who happened to be a Brahmin, came by alone just as the five Pasis were about to eat their meal of pig's meat. Narad scoffed at them for eating raw meat and advised them to make it tastier by adding salt to it and cooking it. Being simple minded, the Pasis took Narad's advice and started cook-ing the meat and adding salt. Since then the strength of the Pasis decreased. Narad then said to Lord, now we will see what the Pasis can do. When the Pasis tried to pull the elephant's tail loose after that, they were unable to do so since their strength had decreased.[3]

Like the Pasis who identify themselves with an upper-caste *rishi* and, in the process, forge a link with the Great Tradition, the Gihar caste, an artisan community whose caste-based profession is to carve statues out of stone, links itself with Maharana Pratap Singh and Prithviraj Chauhan (two famous Rajput kings of the medieval period) in its caste history. Stories narrating these connections were circulated in their oral tradition, which were then converted into the printed form by Hiralal Gihar, one of the few educated members of this caste. He wrote his caste history called the *Bharatiya Adivasi Gihar Itihas*, according to which the Hindus had faced large-scale oppression under the Mughals. Babur had ordered their assets to be taken away, their temples desecrated and converted into mosques and their tufts of hair, the symbol of Brahminism, chopped off. When the battle of Haldighati was fought between Maharana Pratap and the Mughals, the soldiers belonging to the Sisodiya Kshatriya caste, who fought along side Maharana Pratap, were actually Gihars. The soldiers who fought along with Prithviraj Chauhan against Muhammed Ghori in the plains of Tarain too were Gihars. These two battles rendered the Gihars homeless, forcing them to start living in the forests, close to nature. They sustained themselves on the honey and the herbs that the forests provided (Nath 2000: 4).

These stories are being reinterpreted by some groups of Gihars who are a part of the mainstream Dalit movement that glorifies marginalized communities as Dalits under the Ambedkarite ideology. These stories emphasize the idea that the Gihars had to experience gross injustices as a Dalit caste, despite being linked with Maharana Pratap and Prithviraj Chauhan. They now claim that although they had played a major role in history and had sacrificed their lives for the nation, they did not get their proper due because of their marginalized social position. This interpretation gives impetus to the Gihar project of creating a homogeneous Dalit narrative of all the lower castes of UP (ibid.: 4).

Another example of lower castes associating with upper-caste heroes can be seen in the case of Khatiks, an important Dalit caste whose members are spread widely across UP. Khatik settlements, called *khatikana*,

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can be found in almost every city, town and village of this region. Khatiks are also called Mewafarosh although they now prefer to be known as Sonkar since it sounds more respectable. To keep up with the demands of their present socio-economic condition, the urban Khatiks have tried to search for their caste heroes in their oral traditions. After intensive research into the origin of their caste, they have succeeded in associating themselves with Mahatma Durbalnath and Sant Kirorimal, two upper-caste saints mentioned in Hindu religious texts. Yatindra Sonkar of Kanpur, among the few educated persons in his community has created his caste genealogy with a great deal of hard labour and research. He has also penned plays, and written stories and novels around this caste genealogy to popularize it among the Khatiks at the grass-roots (Nath 2000: 3). This has given the caste members a new feeling of respectability and identity and they have begun to celebrate the anniversaries of these heroes as occasions to enhance their caste glory.

The Bhangi caste is one that lies in the bottom-most rung of the lower castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy. It is considered to be a highly polluting caste since its members are usually engaged in sweeping and cleaning. They are known by various names in different states, for example in Punjab they are known as Chuhra; while in UP, Bihar and Rajasthan, they are known as Bhangi, Mehtar, Jharmali, Halalkhor, Raut, Hela, Dom, Domar, Basor and so on. In Punjab, some of the Chuhras who have adopted Sikhism are known as Majhabi and Rangreta. The UP Bhangis have started associating themselves with Balmiki, the writer of Ramayana, which is highly revered by the upper castes, in their oral tradition. They have started calling themselves valmikis and also celebrate the anniversary of the author on a date that they have themselves decided (ibid.: 4).

The Pasis too, besides linking themselves with Parashuram, have discovered and invented a number of caste heroes from the medieval period, who, they claim, played significant roles in the history of the nation and in the freedom movement. These caste heroes were used to elevate their caste pride and caste glory in the region to which they belonged. The story of Bijli Maharaj is very popular among the Pasis of Lucknow, Bahraich, Barabanki, Jaunpur and Allahabad. Suhaldev Pasi is another Pasi character popular in Bahraich. The legend of Daldev Maharaj is popularly narrated among the Pasis living in Rae Bareli, Jaunpur and Allahabad. The story of Baaledeen is circulated in Kaushambhi and Allahabad, while Beera Pasi's story is common in Pratapgarh, Sultanpur and Allahabad. In the area of Oudh, the story of Daldev Pasi and his brothers, Baldev and Kakoran, who are believed to have belonged to the Rae Bareli district is highly popular (Choudhury 1997: 51).

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For the Chamar community, it was a matter of great pride that Sant Ravi Das belonged to their caste. Sant Ravi Das is one of the most popular leaders of the Bhakti period and is considered the icon of all Dalit castes. The Chamars, however, claim that he is a hero of their own caste. Although this caste is at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, it is also the most politically enlightened one. This caste associates itself with Ambedkar, who was a Mahar from Maharashtra, a caste similar in position to the Chamars of UP. Other heroes with whom they associate are Sant Kabir and Gautam Buddha (Nath 2000: 3).

Dhanuk is another small untouchable marginalized community, which explored its oral traditions in search of a hero with whom it could associate itself, in order to consilidate its case identify. The Dhanuks found such a hero in Pannadhai, who was a maid in the palace of Maharaja Rana Sangha of Chittor and looked after Kunwar Uday Singh, the heir to the throne. According to this legend, Pannadhai sacrificed the life of her only son, Chandan, to save Uday Singh, and, thus, prevented the kingdom of Chittor from passing into the hands of its enemies. Pannadhai has now become the caste hero of the entire community which is mainly concentrated in Kanpur, Etawah, Farukhabad, Mainpuri, Etah and Ferozabad. Pannadhai's memory is commemorated by organizing celebrations and other activities annually (ibid.: 4).

Dalit communities also extract their heroes from other genres like folklore. These folklores are often love stories that glorify the protagonist's socio-cultural role in history. The hero of one such story is Sobhnayaka Banjara who is the central character of a popular story of the Banjara caste in north Bihar and the area bordering Nepal. The Banjaras of Gonda and Bahraich in UP also regard Sobhnayaka as their hero. In this love story, which is set in the medieval period, the hero goes to distant places on business with other members of the community. He achieves success despite many obstacles on the way and he also overcomes opposition and hurdles to unite with his lover (Das 1995: 34). Similarly, we find the story of Dina-Bhadri of the Mushahar caste (a seminomad community which survives on rats) in the Mithila region of Bihar. This story revolves around the social struggles of two brave brothers, Dina and Bhadri, who defeated many armies of the higher castes in the medieval period. Other heroes from folklore, who the Mushahars claim as their originators, are Deosi and Savari. They are, popular in different regions. In the regions adjoining Pipri and Mirzapur of UP, the Mushahars are said to be a branch of the Kol tribe known as Cheru, and descendants of the legendary character Deosi. In the Gaya and Magadh regions

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of Bihar, the myth of Savari connects the Mushahars with an ancient and almost forgotten people known as Savari or Seori. These three myths and the caste heroes associated with them are popularly circulated as ballads and legends.[4]

The Dusadh caste associates itself with three popular folk ballads of Bihar whose heroes are Reshma-Chuharmal, Sahlesh and Kunwar Vijaymal. The Dusadhs sing songs and commemorate the memory of their heroes through fairs and festivals. They have iconized these heroes by installing statues and forming socio-political organizations around them in Bihar and UP.

Among the caste heroes of the various Dalit communities, only some have the potential of being converted into symbols of identity. And these have become icons of the Dalit community as a whole. These heroes are now integral constituents in the elevation of the glory and self-esteem of the community. That is why whenever the BJP tries to reject folk narratives by comparing them with puranic narratives, the Dalits lodge strong protests that assert folk culture as their cultural resource. In an incident that took place in Lucknow on 24 September 1998, activists of the Ambedkar Vichar Manch organized a rally to protest against the cultural hegemony of the BJP. The BJP had been trying to propagate the concept of 'one nation one culture' by homogenizing all the folk cultures under one Brahminical Hindu culture. By nation, the BJP meant a nation based on Hindu cultural values as codified in the *Veda*s and the *Purana*s and the epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In this way, all the folk cultures from which the Dalit communities drew their caste heroes were negated. On one of the placards in the rally was painted the slogan 'Stop suppressing folk culture' (*Lok Sanskriti ka daman band karo*). Another placard said 'Down with cultural nationalism' (*Sanskritik Rashtravad Murdabad*). In the rally, the Dalits sentenced Dronacharya, the Guru of the Kauravas and Pandavas in the epic Mahabharata, to be hanged to death for not accepting Eklavya as his student because he belonged to a lower caste. If the cultural values that the BJP was trying to impose prevailed, the sacrifice that Eklavya made for his Guru would be glorified since he did not protest against the unjust treatment meted out to him by Dronacharya simply because he was born into a lower caste. This version was subverted by the Dalits who projected Eklavya as being exploited by Dronacharya because of his low birth. That is why they held a mock trial in which Dronacharya was ordered to be hanged. In the same mock trial the judge sentenced the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, to be hanged for being anti-Dalit.[5]

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Apart from caste and cultural icons, the Dalits of UP also explored the national movement for heroes and still use these heroes in their ongoing efforts towards political mobilization. In Dalit oral traditions, elite nationalist heroes such as Kuar Singh, Tantya Tope and Nana Saheb do not figure. The people who do figure are Chetram Jatav, Ballu Mehtar, Banke Chamar, Vira Pasi, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, her husband Makka Pasi, Avantibai Lodhi, Mahaviridevi, Matadin Bhangi and Udaiya Chamar, who were martyrs born in the lower strata of Indian society. The Dalits claim that Udadevi and her husband Makka Pasi were the only married couple in world history to have laid down their lives for their country during the 1857 Revolt at Sikanderabagh in Lucknow. The Dalits contend that not just the Pasis but the entire country should feel proud of their contribution to the making of independent India (Pasi 1996: 13). They also claim that the first person to inspire the revolt against the British in 1857 was Matadin Bhangi, who instigated Mangal Pandey, the first revolutionary of the elite nationalist narrative, to revolt against the British in the Barrackpore Cantonment (Nath 1998: 1–24). Stories about these heroes are circulated, folk songs are composed, statues are erected and festivals and fairs organized to commemorate them.

These heroes have become part of the folk tradition of the region to which they belong. For example, the story of Udaiya Chamar is popular in the Aligarh region. In the region adjoining Muzaffarnagar, the Dalit hero, Mahaviridevi, is a part of the oral tradition. Jhalkaribai is popular in the Bundelkhand and central UP region. The myth of the 'Courageous Lady' (*Virangana*), Udadevi, is popular in the central region of UP, while in the region adjoining Madhya Pradesh (MP), that is, Baghelkhand of UP, Bundelkhand of UP and MP, the Chitrakoot region of UP and MP and in the territorial region of Allahabad that touches Madhya Pradesh, the myth of Avantibai Lodhi has emerged as a popular folk story among the marginalized Dalit communities. From all these heroes in the oral narratives of the 1857 Rebellion, the BSP, with its aim of building up the image of Mayawati, projects a few women heroes like Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Mahaviridevi and Avantibai Lodhi as heroes of the entire community. During its rule in UP, statues of these heroes were erected at various places in UP. A statue of Jhalkaribai has even been installed in front of the fort of Rani Laxmibai in Jhansi. Fairs and festivals are organized and caste organizations have been formed under their names.

The language of the new narratives that are used for the political mobilization of Dalits by the BSP at present is heavily interspersed with local

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myths, legends and cultural symbols and is, thus, different both from the language used by the Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1956 and the language used by Kanshi Ram in the initial period when the BSP was launched. These two languages were similar to the language used in the Maharashtrian Dalit movement in that they were heavily based on the socio-economic issues of the Dalits and on Ambedkarite thought which had been transmitted in toto to the Dalits at the grass-roots level. The language developed by the BSP later was more innovative and creative, flavoured with the local culture of the Dalit community, its collective memories, myths and histories. The questions raised were the same as the ones raised earlier but they were spiced with the cultural environment of the region. This made it easier for the people to understand and relate to these issues rather than when they were addressed in the hard political language of other political parties.

In the next chapter we will analyse how the political orality of the BSP was formed and how the print media is used for this purpose.

Notes

1. In Brahminical literature, *purana* means both *itihas* (history) and stories. See Veena Das (1977: 10).
2. Bhullar, Godam Patti, Shahabpur, recorded on 8 February 2003.
3. Khichrilal Pasi, Pasiyapur, Shahabpur, recorded on 10 February 2003.
4. Field diary of Dhananjay, Deshkal, November 2004.
5. *Hindustan*, Lucknow 25 September 1998.

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Chapter 2

Formation of Political Orality and the Role of Dalit Print

Once there was a bird catcher. He used to spread nets in the forest for trapping birds. Once, the birds that got caught in his net held a meeting to decide how to escape from the trap. They resolved to unite and apply their strength together to fly away with the net. They did so, and flew away to a far-off place where their other friends helped them to cut the strings of the net and become free. In the history of the forest this was not the first time that animals had escaped from traps laid by hunters, but, in this case, these birds circulated the story of their escape to other animals, so that they too could apply the same method.

—G.P. Madan, 5 January 2005
Allahabad

(While narrating this story, G.P. Madan, a Dalit writer, emphasized that the Dalits too should write their stories and circulate them among other marginalized people.)

If one follows the trajectory of the emergence of Dalit consciouness one sees that their mobilization began with the production of popular literature by the literate sections of the community in order to sensitize the masses to their protest (Schwartz 1997: 179). For this, they had to interpret myths, history and past from a 'Dalit' point of view because it was only by becoming an interest group within India's body politic that they could claim special privileges for themselves in the form of affirmative action by the State (Narayan 2001a: 3926). One of the ways of going about it was to publish their own literature, which contained legends and myths glorifying lower-caste heroes. It is difficult to say whether these legends and myths were originally in the oral form which was later converted into the printed form or whether they were orally disseminated among the Dalits at the grass-roots level from the printed

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form. Investigation into their evolution shows that after the emergence of print culture in the form of Dalit newspapers and popular booklets written by Dalit activists and organic intellectuals these stories became more pervasive among the common people (Narayan and Misra 2004: 21). These popular booklets and newspapers were written and published by the Dalits themselves from small towns in UP and were used to transmit information to the literate sections of the population at the grass-roots level. Through the medium of orality, these also reached the illiterate sections, thus expanding the mass base of these myths and legends (Narayan 2001a: 3923).

Transmission through Print

The Dalit movement started in Maharashtra around 1877 through the efforts of Jyotiba Phule, Gopal Baba Balankar and B.R. Ambedkar. And from the very beginning, publication and propaganda received top priority. Phule started a newspaper called *Deenbandhu* on 1 January 1877, which subsequently proved to be quite influential. Between 1910 and 1930 there were nearly fifty newspapers published by Dalits all over Maharashtra, of which *Bital Vidhwansham*, *Son Vanshiya Mitra*, *Nirashrit*, *Hind* and *Nagrik* are well known. Dr Ambedkar himself edited important newspapers like *Janata* and *Mooknayak*. In the Hindi-speaking region, the one person who played the role of a yeoman in raising the consciousness of the lower castes through education and print culture was Swami Achhutananda. Born in a Chamar family in village Saurikk in Farrukhabad district of UP, his sparkling intelligence allowed him to gain command over Hindi, English, Urdu, Gurmukhi, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Marathi and Bangla at a young age. His awareness of the problems faced by the lower castes led him to join the Arya Samaj, a Hindu religious organization that was dedicated to the uplift of the marginalized by granting them the right to use upper-caste cultural symbols like the sacred thread *janeu* and reading the *Veda*s. Since this process was actually strengthening the upper-caste cultural hegemony, Swami Achhutananda left the Arya Samaj and initiated the Adi Hindu movement in UP in 1922. He propounded a coherent philosophy for the movement. This philosophy was based on the Bhakti literature composed by Bhakti saints of the medieval period like Sant Kabir and Sant Ravi Das, who were also poets and writers. He was also influenced by the Dalit movement of Maharashtra and was in constant correspondence with the leaders of the movement.

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Swami Achhutananda was the first person in North India to set up a press and start the publication of a daily called *Achhut* in 1924 followed by *Adi Hindu* in 1928. Dr Ambedkar was highly appreciative of Swami Achhutananda's social, educational and political efforts in the uplift of the Dalits of North India.[1] In 1934, a Hindi weekly magazine called *Samata* was launched from Almora by Munshi Hariprasad Tamta. These pre-independence Hindi newspapers not only conveyed the philosophy of liberation from social castigation, but also established the significance of print media in Dalit mobilization and identity formation (Bechain 1997: 251). Henceforth, the print media become a great driving force in communicating the plight of the Dalits and also in finding the ways and means for their emancipation. It became a potent mode for the representation of the arithmetic of power and politics, which was later used extensively.

Many more newspapers and magazines were launched both before and after Independence from various places of UP. Some important newspapers and magazines can be seen from Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
Important Dalit newspapers and magazines

Names	*Year of Commencement*	*Editor*	*Place*
Achhut (newspaper)	1917	Swami Achhutananda	Delhi
Adi Hindu (newspaper)	1928	Swami Achhutananda	Kanpur
Samata (weekly magazine)	1934	Hari Prasad Tamta	Almora
Parivartan (magazine)	1950	Swami Ajudhyanath Dandi	Aligarh
Shoshit Pukar (weekly newspaper)	1966	Not mentioned	Bulandshahar
Zamin ke Tare (magazine)	1962	Sewaram Mahashaya	Aligarh
Samta Shakti (weekly newspaper)	1972	Mohandas Naimisharay	Meerut
Nirnayak Bheem (monthly magazine)	1977	Dr Kawaldhari	Kanpur
Lok Chinta (weekly newspaper)	1978	D.R.S. Azad	Bulandshahar
Bahujan Adhikar (fortnightly magazine)	1981	Mohandas Naimisharay	Meerut
Bheem Bhumi (weekly newspaper)	1982	R.K. Gautam	Bulandshahar
Pragya Sahitya (magazine)	1995	O.P. Valmiki	Farookhabad

Sources: Bechain (1997: 252–64) and Baudh (2003: 38).

It can be surmised from Table 2.1 that the majority of these newspapers and magazines were published from various small towns and districts

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in UP. This signifies that Dalit consciousness has gradually begun to gain momentum amongst numerous Dalit communities in different parts of UP. The newspapers and magazines became an agency for transmitting the need for equality and liberation to the members of their communities and played a pivotal role in horizontally disseminating the cry for Dalit assertion. They helped in the formation of the literate section of the Dalits. They were the opinion makers, the community leaders and the social activists. These newspapers were published daily or weekly and the magazines were published fortnightly or monthly. Although the exact figures of their circulation were not available, it can be said that they ranged between 1,000 and 10,000. For example each edition of the fortnightly magazine, *Bahujan Adhikar*, sold around 3,000 copies. The weekly newspaper, *Bheem Bhumi*, sold around 3,000 copies, while the publication of the monthly magazine *Nirnayak Bheem* varied between 2,000 and 3,000 (Gupta 2002: 5) The newspaper, *Bahujan Sangathak*, is the party organ of the BSP and plays an important role in constructing popular perceptions among Dalits. The number of readers is much larger than the number of subscribers since one copy is read and often read aloud to many people. Popular newspapers like *Majhi Janata* and *Bahujan Samaj*, are borrowed, read and discussed by many Dalits living in villages.[2] Figure 2.1 shows the various cities and towns in various regions of UP from where these newspapers and magazines are published. As can be seen from this map these publication centres are scattered all over the state and not concentrated in any one particular region.

Dalit popular booklets are another form of print medium that has helped in motivating the Dalits to develop a culture of struggle for social respect through reading, writing and publishing. These booklets put down in words myths and stories from their oral culture. They are printed on cheap news print (*akhbari*) paper and are about 50–60 pages in length. The printing standards are low and reflect the lack of money available for their production (Narayan 2001a: 3925). Despite the low production level, these booklets sell in large numbers at political meetings, fairs and *Chetna Mandap*s (small book stalls run by Dalit writers, located at various cities and small towns of UP like Balia, Bahraich, Etah, Etawah, Unnao, Urai, Allahabad, Lucknow and so on) (ibid.: 3926). During the last few years they have been written and published on a large scale, giving rise to a distinct class of authors and publishers who are educated and politically conscious. They occupy middle or higher middle-class status in society. For example Suresh Chandra Kushwaha, the author of *Arakshan Ke Hathyare* (Killers of Reservation) is an advocate in the

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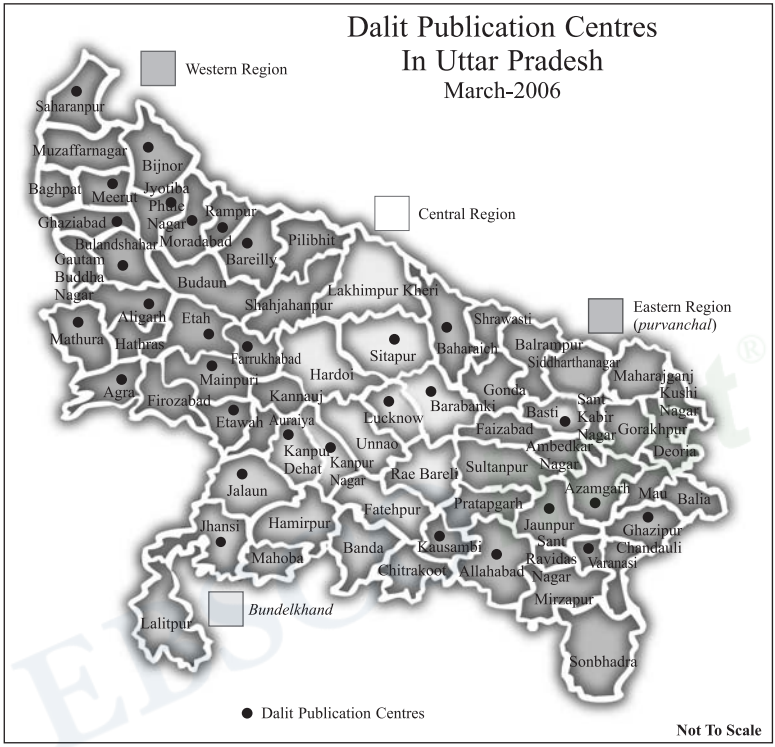
Figure 2.1
Region-wise distribution of Dalit publication centres in UP



Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.

Allahabad High Court. Buddh Sharan Hans, author of *Kash Hum Hindu Na Hote* (If only we had not been Hindus), is a government officer. The author of the poetic life of Ambedkar, *Bhim Pachasa*, G.P. Prashant, is a teacher by profession. Mata Prasad, who wrote *Acchut Virangana*, a drama, is an Ayurvedic doctor (Narayan 2001a: 3924). The major objective behind these booklets is to make Dalits aware about their rights and duties and make them politically conscious. The agenda of this literature is guided by the desire to construct Dalit identity, to create a political language for mobilizing Dalits and to make claims and demands for social, economic and political privileges on the basis of the history of injustice meted out to them in the past. Table 2.2 lists some popular Dalit booklets from the archives of the Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Institute, Allahabad, India. Although it is not an exhaustive collection but the trend

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in the number of booklets published over the decades can be observed (see also Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2
Dalit popular booklets, newspapers and magazines

Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.

Table 2.2
Decade-wise trend of publication of Dalit popular booklets

Decade	*Number of Publication*
1931–40	2
1941–50	2
1951–60	7
1961–70	56
1971–80	13
1981–90	26
1991–2000	114
2001–2006	69

Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.

It can be gathered from Table 2.2 that out of a total of 289 booklets (from 1931 to 2006) collected, the publication of popular Dalit booklets increased considerably in the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s. The

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reason for this was that the Dalits had started feeling disillusioned with the Indian State as they had been excluded from the various developmental projects launched by it as also its various welfare schemes and benefits. All the benefits of the newly emerged state were being reaped by the upper castes and the elites who took advantage of their colonial education to appropriate important posts and portfolios. The rosy dreams, projected to the Dalits by politicians at the time of independence about their inclusion in the development of the nascent country, were found to be vanishing into thin air. This led to an increase in the publication of popular Dalit booklets to express their disillusionment with the State for not fulfilling the promises made to them at the time of independence. The growing consciousness among them due to education, literacy and the various efforts of the State made them aware of their right to a share in the development projects launched by the State. While, on the one hand, the State was making them aware of their rights, on the other hand it was also failing to fulfil their growing aspirations and desires. The one coherent elite story of nationalism that had been fed to the people through the various mediums of the state began to get ruptured with the creation of alternative dalit narratives about the role of lower-caste heroes in the nationalist movement.

The emergence of the BSP in 1984 gave further impetus to the publication of these booklets. The party appealed to writers to write booklets highlighting the problems of SCs, STs and OBCs that formed their electoral base. The literature was concerned with building a society based on equality, justice, freedom and fraternity. It aimed at instilling courage, self respect and generosity by exploring the history of relevant communities, especially the biographies of those saints and heroes who played important roles in the dalit struggle for liberation. Their basic agenda lay in the negation of Brahminic literature and the development of a counter-literature. The party believed that '*bahujan* literature' had to be created in order to bring about social change in the *bahujan samaj* and also to create a renaissance in cultured consciousness among Dalit readers (Narayan 2001a: 3924).

The implementation of the Mandal Commission report (a report of the committee set up by Indira Gandhi to look into the issue of providing protective discrimination to marginalized castes, which was eventually implemented in 1990) also led to the production of booklets in the 1990s in which the Dalit writers tried to justify their need for protective discrimination.[3] Through these booklets they started demanding protective

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discrimination in the form of reservations in education and jobs. The logic posited by them was that while they had been ruling communities earlier the upper castes conspired against them and deprived them of their glorious historical status. They claimed that they had also made significant contributions towards the freeing and the building up of the nation but this had been overlooked after independence by the upper castes who deliberately kept them backward (Kushwaha 1993: 3). The past became the most potent site for such claims, a site which made it possible to embellish and interpret these claims through the present, intermingled with myth and fantasy so that a new perception could be created of a past that was pure, glorious and exclusive (Narayan 2001a: 3929). Thus most of these booklets written in this period were based on their own interpretation of history, which attempted to interpret Indian social history from the 'caste based view' and tried to evoke the glory of the lower castes (ibid.: 3927). Out of twenty-two booklets published by Lakshya Sandhan Prakashan, Bahraich, sixteen were based on history. Cultural Publishers, Lucknow, published thirty-two booklets on historical themes while fourteen out of twenty-two booklets published by Ambedkar Mission Publication, Patna were on historical themes (ibid.: 3926).

Print, Nationalism and Politics

After independence, a consciousness with respect to power sharing gradually percolated down to various strata of society. The post-British State launched various developmental and welfare schemes such as the Five Year Plans, schemes for the poor and marginalized, the abolition of the *zamindari* system and so on. Though the implementation of these programmes was not satisfactory, the propaganda, awareness campaigns and discourses on these attempts made by the welfare state reached the educated and socially and politically aware sections of the various strata of Indian society. This gave birth to an intense desire among the rich, educated and elite sections of various communities to make use of the benefits that the welfare state and democracy could provide. The aware, educated, mostly urban and salaried sections of the Dalits along with a slowly growing middle stratum of the Dalit population also gradually became aware of the fruits of democracy and the welfare State. They started using the print media to present the modern nationalist discourse from the Dalit perspective, which deconstructed the elite nationalist slogan of

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'nation for all'. The news, features and reportage, which came out in newspapers published by the Dalits, tried to make the readers aware of the fact that the nation that was built on the blood and sweat of the Dalits, has been taken away from them and is now in the hands of the upper castes (Narayan and Misra 2004: 21). The production of this kind of narrative was necessary for the Dalit discourse to develop an argument in favour of getting an appropriate share in the power and wealth of the nation. This narrative was circulated through magazines and newspapers among readers who then become a part of this discourse. Discussions that centred around these issues were then transmitted to others, both literate and illiterate, through the secondary process of orality.

In their attempts to create an alternative narrative of the nationalist movement by rupturing the elite nationalist narrative, the Dalits meticulously explored their oral traditions to find heroes who could be positioned parallel to the elite heroes. The stories of these heroes were then disseminated within the educated section through the print media. These educated, in turn, then circulated these stories among the grass-roots sections through rallies, meetings and other forms of Dalit associations. Thus the stories that had once been a part of oral tradition were transferred into the printed form through writing and were then once again converted into the oral form. Now the print medium is also being used to create and disseminate the Dalits' own history of struggle in the creation of the nation. In this manner, the print medium was used to subvert the dominant narratives in Indian societies which kept them marginalized. The stories and legends about local heroes who played important roles in the national movement, such as Udadevi, Jhalkarbai, Mahaveeridevi and Avantibai, Pannadhai; and stories of epical dissenting heroes from the religious texts, like that of Eklavya, were also circulated through the print medium. These stories were picked up from among the people themselves, reinterpreted, packaged and disseminated once again among the common people through popular booklets and pamphlets. In addition to helping build their self-identity, this process helped in politically mobilizing the Dalits in favour of particular political parties, which then transformed into electoral votes. By constructing a popular history of injustices meted out to lower castes in the past, the popular booklets helped to create the power to mobilize Dalits in politics. These booklets provided logical support for acquiring more and more democratic benefits, justified policies such as reservations for the Dalits and finally, helped in the subversion of the dominant discourse by providing a strong basis for an alternative discourse (Narayan 2001a: 3933).

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Education, Print and Writing

The activities of missionaries, private societies and a few individuals prepared the ground for those who advocated the promotion of education as a part of the duty of the British Government (Jha 1985: 21). This helped untouchables and lower castes in gaining entry into schools and acquiring education (Bharti 1992: 4). The British government also took note of their poor socio-cultural condition and, in order to alleviate the position of the lower castes, it prepared a list of backward and oppressed castes in 1934. In the same year, it passed the second India Act, which provided special benefits to untouchable castes and tribal communities. It was after the passing of this Act that there was a significant improvement in the condition of these communities. They were given the opportunity to read and write and were given reservation not only in jobs but also in politics. After 1936 there was an even greater improvement in their condition. It was at this time that Baba Saheb Ambedkar formed the Scheduled Caste Federation and, in July 1945, declared that the government had agreed to his demand for a separate state for the people belonging to SCs and STs who were scattered across the country (Ram 2004: 45).

Acquiring education and trying to integrate the Dalits in the mainstream was not, however, smooth sailing. Public schools were virtually closed to the Chamars (Briggs 1920: 237–38). Both teachers and pupils made it difficult for the lower castes to sit in classrooms. The lower castes, as a result, were not found in any significant number in the schools. But despite the stiff opposition and social constraints disfavouring the educational achievements of the untouchables and backwards, the number of untouchables successful in obtaining education in the United Provinces (the former name of UP) alone was 46,000 in the year 1917 (ibid.: 230). As mentioned in the earlier subsection, this section of educated Dalits attempted to reread history and analyse it from a different perspective. The coming of the print media further effectuated the articulation of their voices of dissent, along with the popularization of a different framework and a new analysis to understand the process of history. Contestations between various ideologies were evident in the literature published since the 1960s in India. The Dalits challenged the Brahminical hegemonic order by utilizing the print media; they further used it to counter the value framework erected by the dominant power groups. In other words, the print media was being utilized by this section to subvert the ideological and cultural structure persisting since ancient times. It helped in injecting new confidence and enthusiasm and enabling greater

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mobilizational power. Moreover, the writings of the ruling class were always full of spaces, which could be exploited by the Dalits to counterpose their own ideologies. Further, the print medium gave cultural self expression to such groups through the efforts of the organic intellectuals of the community. This was understood by visionaries like Swami Achhutananda and the future Dalits followed rigorously the tradition that had been laid down by him.

It is noteworthy that certain Dalit castes that are yet to get entry into the written world have also not entered the discourse of political representational power. For the castes that have written records, it was the link with the written tradition that had been the turning point in their history of protest against social and cultural discrimination. But for every caste that had acquired political empowerment by associating with the print medium, there were many others who had not yet acquired the assertiveness to become a part of the democratic process of the country. These were the highly marginalized castes like the Chhipi (dyer), Mali (gardener), Badhai (carpenter), Lohar (ironsmith), Kumhar (potter), Nai (barber), Rangrej (dyer), Julaha (weaver), Dafali (community which sing songs at marriage ceremonies), Chikwa (butcher) and many other small communities. No organic leadership has emerged from within these communities and they have been languishing on the fringes without access to any of the rights that other assertive castes have enjoyed. It is not a coincidence that none of these castes has any written history or caste legend about its origin. They also do not have popular booklets written by people of their own community linking their caste with the nationalist narrative.

One caste which exemplifies how a written caste history can be an instrument in raising self-esteem and confidence among the caste members and can also help in their democratic participation is the Jogi caste, which also did not have a written caste history for many years. The Jogi caste is an extremely backward Muslim community whose caste-based profession is begging. This caste is mainly concentrated in the districts of UP like Faizabad, Pratapgarh, Jaunpur, Sultanpur and Banaras and constitutes nearly 40 per cent of the total Muslim population. Despite its large number, it remained deprived of all the benefits of development for a long period of time. The literacy rate of this caste was less than 1 per cent. This caste was looked down upon by all other castes since it followed its traditional profession of begging. Neither the government nor the elders of this community were concerned about the plight of these people. When the people of this caste went to government officials to claim some benefits provided to SCs they were turned away saying that Muslims did not

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fall within the definition of SCs. Their pleas fell on deaf ears till the only organic intellectual of the community, Dr Moharram Ali, took the initiative of linking this caste with the Dalit movement led by the BSP. The first thing that he did was to collect the caste history of the Jogis from the older members. He then wrote a booklet narrating its caste glory and disseminated it among the illiterate Jogis to raise their self-esteem. When the other castes heard about the past glory of the Jogis they too felt impressed. This elevated the pride of the Jogis, built up their self confidence and helped in their identity assertion. This identity assertion was crucial for political mobilization and development. The history of the Jogis reveals that they were earlier a Hindu marginalized lower caste called Gosai. A roving saint (*jogi*) of this caste converted to Islam and the present day Jogis are his descendants. The *jogi* from whom the Jogi caste claims its lineage, could perform miracles. This made him very popular among the people who gave him alms as reward. His descendants continued to follow this profession, which eventually became the caste-based profession of the Jogis. This story was narrated by Dr Ali at all Jogi caste meetings or *sabha*s so as to transform the listeners into political entities. He then linked them with the BSP by claiming their Dalit origin, which he felt would be more effective for their uplift than their Muslim identity. The caste members claim that although they are Muslims by religion, culturally they are Hindus. Today, the Jogis have acquired the confidence to stand for elections for the post of Gram Pradhan in their villages and some have even won them (Bharti 1997: 71–72)

Construction of Narrative Types

The small newspapers and the local initiatives to develop a print culture among the Dalits were helpful in the creation of a reading and writing public. The versions, opinions and interpretations communicated through these newspapers and popular booklets percolated down to the common people and were translated during the oral discourse of activists and social leaders. The method through which the Dalits learn about their own past is referred to as *parh-likh ke*. Even the illiterate people say that they became aware of the suffering and oppression imposed on them by the dominant section through *parh-likh ke*. It is noteworthy that, to provide legitimacy to their personal experiences, they sometimes propose that they had acquired knowledge by *parh-likh ke*. The processes of construction, transmission and percolation of certain ideology-directed knowledge

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about their identity is revealed by Dalits living in Shahabpur, a village near Allahabad, during the narration of their histories and through the narratives of the suffering and the oppression that they have faced for the last fifty years.[4]

While discussing the history of the Chamars, Pyarelal, aged seventy-six years, living in Godampatti, Shahabpur, narrated,

> My name is Pyarelal. I would like to tell you about the history and the past of the Chamars. Earlier, long grass reeds used for sweeping the ground (*Jhakhars*) were tied around our feet to clean the ground on which we walked. But in case a few footprints got left behind, the upper castes would walk down the road only after the wind or an animal had cleared them away. When the children of our caste went to school, they were made to sit on the ground while the upper castes sat on mats. When they drank water they were cautioned not to touch the pot (*lota*) or it would become polluted.

Pyarelal went on to narrate the story of the origin of the Chamars.

> Earlier Brahmins and Chamars were real brothers (*sagey bhai*). Once Rishi Ashtavakra (whose body had eight distortions), went to the house of the Brahmins for a religious ceremony in which a cow was to be donated to God (*godaan*). Ashtavakra was given a cow as a gift but he refused saying that he would not take anything. At this, some of the Brahmins started deriding both him and his distorted body. This angered the Rishi who cursed the Brahmins who were laughing at him, saying that since they were laughing at the 'bones and flesh' (*haar-maans*) of a person, they would have to work with *haar-maans* all their lives. These Brahmins then became Chamars whose caste-based profession is to skin dead animals and remove their bones.[5]

When Pyarelal was asked how he knew all these things he replied '*parh-likh ke*', although he was totally illiterate. It appears that knowledge about both the experiential past and the mythical past of the Chamars had been acquired by *parh-likh ke*.

In Godampatti, which is inhabited mainly by Chamars, the memory of an oppressive past has created a strong sense of identity and caste pride among them. This pride is also visible among the women as is evident from the narrative of an old Chamar woman called Jhuria who vividly described the oppression that she suffered when she was young and had worked in the Raja's (landlord of that region) house as a servant. When she, along with the other women, would go to the Raja's bungalow, the Rani and the other members of the household would not look at her face while talking to her. While grinding wheat and *makara* on the grindmill

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